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South Vietnam: Growing
Manpower Squeeze
June 1969

June 1969 South Vietnam: The Growing Manpower Squeeze

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USAID review
completed

ARMY review
completed

State Dept. review completed

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South Vietnam: The Growing Manpower Squeeze

ARMY review completed

Introduction

As the tempo of combat in South Vietnam has increased and Saigon's participation in the conflict has grown, the Government of South Vietnam (GVN) has been compelled to dig deeply into its available manpower resources to meet its military manpower requirements. The Communist Tet 1968 offensive in particular spurred the Saigon regime into greater efforts to mobilize the population and to increase the country's commitment to its own defense. The General Mobilization Act of 15 June 1968 called for the mobilization of most males between the ages of 16 and 50, with those in the 18-38 age group liable for service in the regular and territorial forces. Males in the 16-17 and 39-50 age groups are eligible only for part-time service in the newly-created People's Self-Defense Forces, although those 39-43 years of age may be given noncombat assignments in rear service units.

Since 1967, the number of men serving in South Vietnam's regular and territorial forces has increased nearly one-third, and the total number of men in all Government of South Vietnam (GVN) military ^{and paramilitary} forces has risen to more than one million. As a result, the share of the population under arms has climbed to an estimated 4.8 percent (5.9 percent if the paramilitary forces are included),* the highest in the world. In Taiwan, for example, this ratio is 4.1 percent; in North Vietnam, 2.8 percent; and in the Soviet Union, 1.4 percent.

*If only the GVN-controlled population is included, the estimated shares are 5.8 percent and 6.8 percent, respectively.

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As the GVN has striven to meet its military requirements, it has had to shortchange the burgeoning civilian manpower demands (particularly the demand for skilled labor) generated by an accelerated wartime urbanization. An estimated 30-40 percent of the country's population is now located in or near the main population centers. The migration from rural to urban areas, which has been particularly rapid since 1964, stems largely from the intensification of military operations ~~and Viet Cong (VC) terrorism in the countryside~~ and the job opportunities in the cities created by the US military buildup. In addition, the expansion of the GVN's military forces has been accompanied by an increased flow of military dependents to the cities. As a result of this population influx, the manpower demands for industry, commerce, civil service, construction, and public services have risen, and at a rate faster than the supply of available human resources. Consequently, the country's manpower pool has been strained and Saigon will be hard pressed to fulfill any anticipated expansion of its military forces without seriously impeding its economic growth. Moreover, the manpower shortage has been and will continue to be an important contribution to inflationary pressure.

Growth of South Vietnam's Military Forces

South Vietnam's military and paramilitary forces have more than doubled since 1963. At the end of March 1969, the GVN had more than one million men under arms (see Table 1).

Table 1
Growth of South Vietnam's Military Forces
1963 - March 1969^{a/}

	In Thousands				
	1963	1966	1967	1968	Mar 1969
Regular Forces	216.0	322.9	442.9	426.9	434.5
Regional Forces	85.9	149.9	151.4	219.8	232.0
Popular Forces	95.5	150.1	148.8	172.5	176.0
Total RVNAF Forces	<u>397.4</u>	<u>622.9</u>	<u>643.1</u>	<u>819.2</u>	<u>842.5</u>
National Police	19.7	58.3	73.4	78.4	77.1
Revolutionary Development Cadre	0	0	37.0	45.9	47.3
Civilian Irregular Defense Groups	18.0	34.7	38.3	42.3	44.0
Truong Son Cadre	0	0	6.7	7.0	7.3
Armed Propaganda Teams	0	0	0	3.8	4.0
Kit Carson Scouts	0	0	.3	1.5	1.9
Total Paramilitary Forces ^{b/}	<u>128.4</u>	<u>113.0</u>	<u>155.7</u>	<u>178.9</u>	<u>181.6</u>
Total RVN Forces	<u>525.8</u>	<u>735.9</u>	<u>798.8</u>	<u>998.1</u>	<u>1,024.1</u>

a. Data are for end of period shown.

b. Armed Combat Youth data are included in total from 1960 through 1966; the organization was disbanded in 1967.

The manpower for the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) -- the Regular Forces and the Regional and Popular Forces (RF/PF) -- consists of volunteers and draftees, with the former having accounted for 70-80 percent of the total during the past three years. The manpower input for 1966 totaled about 205,000 men, but fell to 164,000 in 1967 (see Table 2). The number soared to nearly 315,000 in 1968 as a result of Saigon's post-Tet 1968 mobilization program. The number of conscripts more than doubled and voluntary enlistments jumped about 85 percent. The latter increase probably reflects in large part the effort of many to avoid the draft in order to join the

territorial forces and remain close to their home areas. The strength of RF/PF forces increased about 90,000 during 1968. The paramilitary forces are staffed almost entirely with volunteers, and these averaged about 30,000 men annually during the last three years.

Table 2

South Vietnamese Military Volunteers and Conscripts
1966 - March 1969

	In Thousands			
	Manpower Input			Paramilitary Volunteers
	Volunteers	Conscripts	Total	
1966	159.1	46.1	205.2	28.2
Monthly Average	13.2	3.8	17.1	2.4
1967	115.8	48.5	164.3	33.1
Monthly Average	9.6	4.0	13.6	2.8
1968	215.3	99.1	314.4	28.8
Monthly Average	17.9	8.2	26.2	2.4
1969				
January	8.3	6.8	15.1	2.7
February	11.1	7.0	18.1	1.4
March	20.6	5.4	26.0	1.8

Attrition of South Vietnam's Military Forces

While the South Vietnamese forces have received sizable inputs in recent years, their attrition also has been high. This attrition has consisted almost entirely of desertions and combat casualties (see Table 3).^{*} Losses of 152,000 in 1966 and 122,000 in 1967 equalled about 75 percent of total accretions for each of these years. In 1968, losses jumped to 203,000, but were only two-thirds of total accretions because of the sharp rise in personnel inputs.

^{*}There is no information available on other types of attrition, such as retirement. However, the magnitude of other attritive factors is not considered significant.

Table 3
South Vietnamese Military Losses
1966 - 1968

	In Thousands		
	1966	1967	1968
Total Losses ^{a/}	152.5	122.1	203.4
Net Desertions	116.4 ^{b/}	77.7	116.1
Casualties:			
Killed in Action	36.1	44.4	87.3
Wounded, non-fatal ^{c/}	20.9	29.4	61.1
Missing/Captured	3.3	2.3	1.9

- a. Paramilitary not included.
b. Gross desertions.
c. There is no information concerning the number of wounded who return to action. However, the GVN only includes those whose wounds are serious enough to require hospital care. Therefore, the number returning is not believed to be large enough to affect significantly the aggregate analysis.

Desertions

The major share of RVNAF losses has been through desertions; during the 1966-68 period, desertions accounted for nearly two-thirds of total attrition. Desertions totaled 116,000 in 1966, dropped to 78,000 the next year, and jumped to 116,000 during 1968.* In addition, an average of 8,600 men deserted annually from the paramilitary forces during those years.

The average monthly desertion rate of 10.5 per thousand troops in 1967 was substantially less than the rate of 16.3 recorded in 1966. However, the rate for 1968 increased to 12.7 per thousand troops. Although the rate during the first quarter of 1968 continued to reflect the downward trend of 1967 (averaging 7.7 per thousand troops), it jumped sharply after March,

*Figures for 1966 are gross desertions; for 1967 and 1968 they are net desertions (gross desertions less returnees).

reaching a high of 17.3 in October. Averages of about 15 per thousand recorded during the third and fourth quarters of the year were the highest since a GVN crackdown on desertions in mid-1966. The rate subsequently began to decline, falling to 8.3 in February 1969. In March, the rate rose to 10.7 and the quarterly rate remained well above the average for the first quarter of 1968.

A particularly significant trend is the comparatively high rate of desertions among the major combat units which are expected to eventually replace US combat forces. Desertions from regular combat units during 1968 were at a rate estimated to equal about one-third of the strengths of these units. Thus, the overall RVNAF average is substantially reduced by the lower rate of desertions among RF and PF units. The rate among the regular units in 1969^{has} continued at a high level. The March rate for ARVN's 10 infantry divisions ranged from 13.5 per thousand to 50.4 per thousand with an overall divisional average of 28.4 per thousand.

Casualties

The other element in available attrition data is combat casualties. The country's battle casualties have risen sharply as RVNAF participation in the war has increased. These totaled nearly 87,500 in 1968, about double the casualties sustained in 1967 and more than 140 percent greater than those in 1966. Combat deaths in these years averaged about 30 percent of total casualties. There are no casualty figures available for the paramilitary

forces prior to 1968. In 1968, paramilitary units suffered nearly 14,000 casualties, of which about 3,600 were combat deaths.

South Vietnam's Manpower Pool

Any assessment of Saigon's ability to maintain (and expand) its military forces depends for the most part on estimates of the country's available manpower. Estimating the size of this pool, however, is risky since accurate demographic information on South Vietnam does not exist. South Vietnam is one of the few countries that has never had a national census, and the most recent area census was a pilot study of Phuoc Tuy Province undertaken in 1959. Currently, the most widely used population figure is an estimated 17.2 million in 1968. An additional obstacle to estimating the GVN manpower pool is the impossibility of determining with any great degree of accuracy the share of the South Vietnamese population under the effective control of Saigon.

The most recent estimate of South Vietnam's population distribution was undertaken by the US Agency for International Development in 1967. According to this study, there were about 3.5 million males in the country between the ages of 15 and 49. Using these figures as a base, we estimate the manpower pool available to the GVN to be about 2.1 million men and those in the 18-38 group at more than 1.3 million (see Table 4). However, more than one million men already were under arms at the end of March, 1969, leaving a residual of some 350,000 men available for induction into the military forces.

Table 4

Estimated South Vietnamese Manpower Pool
in 15-49 Year Age Group

Age Group	In Thousands		
	Number of Males	Number Less Those Under VC Control ^{a/}	Number Less Those Unfit for Service ^{b/}
15-17	540	459	321
18-33	1,784	1,516	1,061
34-38	460	391	274
39-44	429	365	256
45-49	329	280	196
Total	<u>3,542</u>	<u>3,011</u>	<u>2,108</u>

- a. The Hamlet Evaluation Survey (HES) of January 1969 estimated that 10.9 percent of the population was under VC control. Another 9.2 percent were in so-called contested areas. Assuming half of the latter to be under VC control, we thus eliminate about 15 percent.
- b. The GVN has reported that about 30 percent of draft age men are found to be unfit for military service.

Since most of the eligible draftable population already have been conscripted, any sizable number of future conscripts must come from those reaching 18 years of age. It has been estimated that 320,000 South Vietnamese reach the age of 18 each year, more than half of them males. Eliminating those ostensibly under VC control and those unfit for service, the estimated annual accretion would be around 100,000. Thus, the estimated total draftable manpower in the 18-38 age group available at the beginning of 1969 was about 450,000.

Impact on the Labor Force

Although the mobilization program has as yet not created any serious general labor shortage, it has cut deeply into the country's limited supply of skilled manpower. The impact has been particularly severe in urban areas

where the bulk of the skilled labor is located. About 30 percent of the 6.2 million South Vietnamese estimated to be in the civilian labor force are engaged in nonagricultural pursuits, primarily in the cities and towns. Since the GVN has greater control over the urban areas, it seems likely that a disproportionate share of the draftees are coming from these areas.

According to studies undertaken by the US Embassy in Saigon, approximately 90 percent of Vietnamese civil servants are considered to be skilled. Perhaps 60 percent of the Vietnamese employees of the US sector of the economy can be classified as skilled and semi-skilled. Civilian government employment was frozen at the 30 April 1968 level, and drafted personnel have not been replaced. The impact of mobilization has been felt most in such highly technical government operations as the Saigon Metropolitan Water Office and Directorate of Civil Aviation and in such private companies as Esso Standard Eastern, which employs a large number of technically trained, draft-eligible young men.

The mid-June mobilization bill provided for limited deferments for police, Revolutionary Development cadre, technical specialists, and teachers, as well as for public health and education personnel serving in the countryside. In September 1968 the government decided to exempt from the draft all primary school teachers serving at the hamlet level and to allow all secondary and primary school teachers on the government payroll in larger towns to continue teaching after attendance at a nine-week military training course. In the private sector, where as many as one-fifth of all employees are believed to

eligible for the draft, agreement was reached with the Ministry of National Defense (MOND) in October 1968 on deferment criteria affecting employees in more than 1,000 manufacturing and commercial firms. Approximately 40,000 men in the civil service and private sectors have received deferments.

Mobilization at the present rate in combination with the lack of a well-defined deferment policy for skilled civilian personnel will further deplete the number of needed administrators, managers, technicians, and skilled craftsmen who are as necessary for effective civilian operations as they are for the armed forces. There are some 20,000 third-country nationals employed in South Vietnam (primarily skilled workers and technicians from South Korea and the Philippines), but their number is not likely to increase significantly in view of the political sensitivity which surrounds their employment. Moreover, with few exceptions, these nationals are employable only in the US sector.

Outlook

Unless the GVN alters its draft regulations, it is likely to be hard pressed to meet its future military manpower requirements. Not only will the military begin to encounter shortages of skilled personnel, but difficulty in tapping the existing manpower pool also is likely to emerge. Even if attrition of Saigon's military forces during 1969 does not reach last year's level, it is likely to remain high as RVNAF combat participation continues to increase. Military replacement requirements alone are likely to be more than 150,000 men. Combat casualties during the first quarter of 1969 were at

an annual rate of about 75,000 men. Desertions also are running at a similar rate, but are likely to rise as the number of 18 year old draftees increases.*

Even assuming the unlikely event that the entire crop of new 18-year olds are drafted in 1969, Saigon would still have to find upwards of 50,000 men to fill the remaining estimated gap. This, of course, assumes no expansion of forces. Should the US begin to pull out any troops, replacements for them would have to be found.** Saigon has in fact announced that it plans to increase its regular forces by 71,000 men during 1969 in the expectation that some US troops will start to withdraw this year.

Thus, in order to fill its military manpower gap, Saigon either would have to draft men over 38 and/or lower the fitness requirements. Drafting men in the 39-44 group would increase the availability pool by more than 250,000 men. Lowering standards so that only 25 percent are rejected would add an additional 100,000 men. In both cases, however, it is likely that the quality of manpower would be lowered.

*A recent OASD/SA study indicated that the high desertion rate in 1968 was due in large part to the sizable numbers of new men being drafted. It indicated that perhaps 80 percent of the deserters were men with less than 6 months of military service. These men presumably succumb quickly to the pressures of severed family ties, unfamiliar surroundings, and poor morale.

**This assumes an unrealistic 1:1 ratio. OASD/SA has estimated that an ARVN division functions about half as well as a US division, or a 2:1 ratio.